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ABSTRACT

Using data from a longitudinal study of beginning music teachers in Michigan, this paper examines how policy makers and induction program designers can provide for the content-specific induction needs of music teachers. The study examined beginning music teachers' early teaching experiences, how school districts and communities supported their induction, what types of formal new teacher induction and mentor programs the districts provided, how mentors and administrators viewed induction programs, and what beginning music teachers wished had been provided. Respondents' comments focused on difficult teaching schedules, isolation, classroom management, and planning. Music teachers described the district-sponsored mentor and induction programs as varied and inconsistent. Teachers from the most extensive programs were dissatisfied with those programs. Mentors and administrators were aware that the district-sponsored programs did not meet teachers' needs but had no immediate solutions due to funding, scheduling, and logistical issues. Music teachers wished they could have opportunities to interact with other music teachers. They wanted professional development experiences that focused specifically on strategies for music classrooms. They did not want to be required to attend professional development workshops that did not address the context of a music classroom. (Contains 34 references.) (SM)

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Meeting the Induction Needs of Beginning Music
Teachers: What Can Policy-Makers and Program Designers
Do?

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Meeting the Induction Needs of Beginning Music Teachers: What Can Policy-Makers and Program Designers Do?

Abstract

Based primarily on a longitudinal phenomenological investigation of beginning music teachers in mid-Michigan, the purpose of this paper is to provide information regarding what policy-makers and induction program designers can do to provide for the content-specific induction needs of music teachers. Findings which mirror research with other beginning teachers included: difficult teaching schedules, isolation, classroom management, and planning. Concerns that are specific to music teachers included: choosing literature and concert planning, planning music classroom activities, administrative concerns, and K-12 certification. I also discuss the role of higher education and state music organizations and the need for assistance within the school building, both of which were themes drawn from the data.

Meeting the Induction Needs of Beginning Music Teachers: What Can Policy-Makers and Program Designers Do?

Assisting beginning teachers through induction and mentor support programs has been recommended as a teacher retention and improvement strategy in much of the teacher education research (Feiman-Nemser, 1993; Feiman-Nemser, Schwille, Carver, & Yusko, 1999; Gold, 1996; Gratch, 1998; Griffin, 1999; Hawkey, 1997; Kester & Marockie, 1987; Kilgore & Kozisek, 1989; Lawson, 1992; Morey & Murphy, 1990; Odell & Ferraro, 1992; Perez, Swain, & Hartsough, 1997; Stewart, 1992; and Thies-Sprinthall & Reiman, 1997). Of concern to music educators is that these studies did not examine data specific to music teachers (or other specialists). Conway, Krueger, Robinson, Haack and Smith (2002) suggest that the research that forms the basis for educational policy may not reflect the needs of the beginning music teacher population. There is an emerging research base regarding the beginning music teacher (Conway, 2001a, 2001b, 2003; Conway & Garlock, 2002; DeLorenzo, 1992; Krueger, 1996, 1999, 2000; Montague, 2000, and Smith 1994) by which to inform policy and practice. Based primarily on my own longitudinal investigation of beginning music teachers, the purpose of this paper is to provide information regarding what policy-makers and induction program designers can do to provide for the content-specific induction needs of music teachers.

Beginning Music Teacher Research in Mid-Michigan

Recommendations provided in this paper were drawn from my study of beginning music teachers in mid-Michigan (Fall 1999 – present). Research questions for that inquiry included: (a) How do these beginning music teachers describe their early teaching experiences?; (b) How have school districts and communities supported the induction of

these teachers?; (c) What types of formal new teacher induction and mentor programs exist in these school districts?; (d) How do beginning music teachers describe their induction and mentor programs?; (e) How do others associated with the beginning teachers (mentors, administrators, and the researcher) view the induction programs? (f) If there is no induction program, what do beginning music teachers wish had been provided?

The state policy in Michigan regarding beginning teachers requires districts to provide two programs:

Sec. 1526. For the first 3 years of his or her employment in classroom teaching, a teacher shall be assigned by the school in which he or she teaches to 1 or more master teachers, or college professors or retired master teachers, who shall act as a mentor or mentors to the teacher. During the 3-year period, the teacher shall also receive intensive professional development induction into teaching, based on a professional development plan that is consistent with the requirements of section 3a of article II of Act No. 4 of the Public Acts of the Extra Session of 1937, being section 38.83a of the Michigan Compiled Laws, including classroom management and instructional delivery. During the 3-year period the intensive professional development induction into teaching shall consist of at least 15 days of professional development, the experiencing of effective practices in university-linked professional development schools, and regional seminars conducted by master teachers and other mentors.

(Michigan Education Department, 1994)

Participants and Data Sources

Primary participants in the Michigan study of beginning music teachers included seven music teachers who began teaching in Fall of 1999 and have continued in the study and seven music teachers who began teaching in Fall of 2000 and have continued in the study. The participants represent a mixture of genders and types of music teaching positions (i.e. strings, band, choral, general music). They also represent a cross-section of communities (urban, rural and suburban). Data from the primary participants included: Fall and Spring individual interviews each year; Fall and Spring teaching observations each year; two focus group interviews each year; end-of the-year questionnaires completed at the end of the first and the second year of teaching; interviews with mentors and principals of each teacher, email logs, and personal journals.

Questionnaire responses were obtained from five other beginning teachers in 1999 and six others in 2000. Email questionnaires were completed by 15 teachers who had begun teaching in Fall 2001. During the 2001-2002 school year additional interviews were completed with two beginning teachers and two mentors who were not in the initial study in Fall 1999. I searched for teachers who were having particularly strong mentor and induction experiences so to have a sense of “best practice” in mentoring and induction for music teachers in Michigan.

Observation field notes, interview transcripts from all participants (beginning teachers, mentors, and administrators), focus group transcripts, teacher journals, email communications, and the researchers’ personal log were reviewed and coded. The initial research questions guided this search for themes and coding process, as did my

knowledge of the teacher induction and mentoring literature in general education and the policy issues associated with induction and mentoring.

Findings

This presentation of findings seeks answers to the question “How can policy-makers and program designers meet the induction needs of beginning music teachers?” I begin with evidence and discussion of music teacher concerns that mirror those of other beginning teachers, and continue with concerns that are specific to music teachers. I also discuss the role of higher education and state music organizations and the need for assistance within the school building, both of which were themes drawn from the data.

Concerns Which Mirror Those of Other Beginning Teachers

Concerns of beginning teachers which have been documented in the research literature (Feiman-Nemser, Schwille, Carver, and Yusko, 1999; Griffin, 1999; Lortie, 1975; Scherer, 1999; Valli, 1992; and Veenman, 1984) that were also evident in this research with music teachers include: having multiple teaching assignments (some outside of their content area) and difficult schedules; feelings of isolation; classroom management; and not having enough time for planning.

Difficult schedules.

I am a band director. I played in band in high school. I did my student teaching in band. I got hired to teach band. However, over the summer before I started I found out that my job would be band (5th- 12th grade) AND several sections of fourth grade music. Boy, was I surprised. (Email survey response)

Besides teaching my beginning band, middle school band, and high school band classes each day, here are my other job responsibilities: oversee the private lesson

program, teach before school jazz band once a week, teach after school jazz band at the middle school one day a week, prepare students for and attend the middle school solo festival, the middle school band festival, the high school solo festival, the high school band festival, and the marching band festival. Of course, if we do well at the band festivals, the district will want us to attend the state band festival. If the sports teams do well, I'll have to attend play-offs for football and basketball. What else? Marching band meets one night a week in the fall and then again in April for parade preparation. Next year the band parents want me to take the high school students on a trip to Toronto.

(First year teacher - End of year questionnaire)

Many music teachers begin their careers in smaller school districts that need one music teacher to do a variety of musical things that they may or may not be prepared for. In interviewing the principals of these new teachers all of them agreed that the job description of the music teacher is an awesome one. However, there were no suggestions from administrators regarding how to change this. I believe it is a part of the culture of music education in general. Music educators spend a great deal of time justifying our very existence in the curriculum. Yet, if teachers are given schedules that are completely unreasonable we can never get to the point where the aesthetic value of music can even be discovered.

Isolation.

It has been really hard not having anyone to go to with my issues. The classroom teachers pretty much think of me as planning time, so it is hard to break in (Allison, fall 1999).

As far as the most difficult thing this year, I guess I would say I am pretty lonely up here (music teacher in a rural district, email questionnaire response, 2001)

Music teachers are often the only teacher of music in the building and sometimes in the district. Induction programs may need to employ music teachers outside the district in order to provide for music teachers. Bringing together beginning music teachers in county or district-wide programs is a possibility as well. Arts teachers are often paired together for team meetings and support. However, the connections between the “specials” areas may be unrelated to the stated needs of each individual “specials” area.

Classroom management.

Well, I have been struggling a lot with managing the students. I mean, there are 120 fifth grade band students and only 80 chairs. I went to my professional development thing last week after school and when I shared my situation, the presenter said “Wow, I don’t really know what to tell you.” (Tim, Fall 1999)

Since I don’t have a room I have to deal with whatever discipline is going on in the class when I get there. It is really hard to have any kind of classroom management policy for music when every room I travel to is so diverse. (Marie, Spring 2000)

Issues of classroom management for music teachers are complex. Music teachers often have 50 – 100 (up to even 300 for marching band) students in the room at the same time. Elementary music teachers often travel on a cart from classroom to classroom. Thus, providing suggestions and support for classroom management requires knowledge of the specific teaching context.

Planning.

I'm embarrassed to say it, but I pretty much keep one step ahead of the kids. I have so many administrative duties associated with the band, that I just don't have time to plan rehearsals or study my scores (Penny, Fall 2000).

I had a real nightmare with grading this year. No one really talked me through how it was supposed to work and with so many in each class, it is pretty challenging to really know what's what. (Adam, Spring 2001)

The teacher education literature documents “lesson-planning” as a common area of concern for beginning teachers. Along those lines, music teachers discussed choosing literature for performing ensembles and designing classroom activities for elementary classes. Although I view this content to be similar, once again music teachers are at a disadvantage when it comes to planning. Very few schools have written curriculum documents for music. Available tools for assessment are even more scarce. In addition, preservice education in music focuses less on curriculum and assessment than general preservice teacher education. Music teachers are often prepared to put on performances but they are not always ready for approaching their subjects in a curricular way. In addition, many music programs have such a strong tradition of performance, that appropriately sequencing learning becomes a challenge in the midst of performance expectations.

Beginning music teachers need assistance in providing standards-based instruction and assessment.

Concerns that Are Specific to Music

Choosing literature and concert planning.

I really need help in picking the right pieces for these students to work on. I just don't seem to know how long it will take them to learn and what I should be expecting (Brian, Fall 1999).

The best thing my mentor did was to pick the music for my first concert. You might think, "how horrible, didn't you want to chose your own?" But, I don't think I would have made it through that first concert without his help (Ellen, spring 2001)

Choosing concert literature and arranging for concerts, parades, festivals etc. presents a difficult challenge for the novice teacher who is often unfamiliar with available music resources and is also not skilled at assessing the musical potential of a group of students. Induction for music teachers must include assistance in this area.

Planning music classroom activities.

I feel like I really know what to do with the younger grades. But, I am really struggling with planning for the fifth graders. My preservice teacher taught us a lot more about K-1. I student taught in a K-4 building, and I just feel pretty lost. (Marie, Fall 1999)

It just seems like I don't know enough things to do with these students. I find myself repeating the same activities over and over. How do I find more ideas? When am I supposed to have time to do that? (Alison, Spring 2001).

Although "lesson planning" is a common beginning teacher need, the needs of the music teacher are different in that the music teacher is often planning across a wide variety of grade levels and musical skill levels. An experienced content-area specialist is needed to provide lesson-planning assistance to the beginning music teacher.

Administrative duties.

Pretty much all I seem to do is the administrative stuff. That is about 90% of this job. The music part feels like the least of my worries. (email survey, 2001)

I am pretty much overwhelmed right now by the paperwork – bus requests, purchase orders, school board meetings, solo forms, student recommendations. When I am suppose to have time to teach? (email communication, 2000)

Particularly at the secondary level, the administrative duties of the high school band, orchestra or choral director are immense. Budget planning, purchase orders, five-year needs assessments, parent booster meetings etc. create an over-whelming amount of unfamiliar work for the beginning music teacher. It is recommended that this administrative load be considered when making a secondary teacher's schedule. Some school districts in the study allowed a one hour (one course) release time to account for the incredible administrative responsibility of the secondary music teacher.

K-12 certification.

In most states music is a K-12 certification area. However, few music teachers exit preservice education prepared to teach at all grade levels and in all areas (band, orchestra, choir, general) of music. Building administrators, policy-makers and program designers must recognize that if the music teacher is asked to teach outside of their area of familiarity, then professional development will be a necessity in order for that teacher to be successful.

Role of Higher Education and State Music Organizations

I think it would be great if you or someone from the Michigan School Band and Orchestra Association could come out and help her (principal interview, Spring 2000)

There are some messy logistics, but I'd support using Universities and state organization people to support the content needs (professional development coordinator, Michigan Department of Education, Fall 2001 interview)

Some of the beginning teacher literature describes induction programs that are housed in University settings (Kilgore & Kozisek, 1989; Morey & Murphy, 1990; Perez, Swain, & Hartsough, 1997). Several of the mentors and principals expressed their thanks for my assisting with the beginning music teacher induction process just through my work with this study. Many of them suggested that departments of music within colleges and universities may be able to provide for beginning music teachers in a way that the school districts can not. Of course, there are problems with this suggestion with regards to faculty loads and funding (Conway, Haack, Krueger, Robinson, and Smith, 2002). However, teacher educators may wish to consider a more proactive role in providing for recent graduates.

I have been working with the state music organizations as well as the state education department here in Michigan to find a way for state organizations to participate more meaningfully in beginning music teacher induction. Many of the principals suggested that if state organizations had a formal program which could count for inservice credit that they would be happy to turn the induction of music teachers over to state organizations.

Assistance in the Building

The one really great thing about my mentor, even though she was not a music person, is that she kept me up on all the things I needed to know about this building - who to talk to, who to avoid, all the word on the street (Jane, Fall 2000)

I feel strongly that all my teachers need a mentor in the building. How else can they get settled? (principal, Spring 2001)

Beginning music teachers need content support. However, they also need building-level assistance. Most music teachers travel to at least two buildings a week and some see students in even nine or ten buildings per week. Keeping informed regarding building policies, assemblies, fire drills, etc. is a challenge for the music teacher. Some of the participants in this study suggested that induction and mentor programs for music teachers should include two mentors – one at the building level and one content-area person.

I really wish that my assigned mentor had been someone else in the building other than the other music teacher. I had a hard time getting to know the other staff. I was going to get to know the music teachers with or without the mentor program and the mentor program could have been a way for me to get to know someone else (Elle, Fall 2000)

Due to the traveling schedule, the nature of music teacher scheduling and the separate nature of the music content itself, it is often difficult for music teachers to feel like they are part of a school community. A mentor or induction program can help this issue by providing an opportunity for the music teacher to interact with others in the building and/or district.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Music teachers in this study described the district-sponsored mentor and induction programs in their schools as varied and inconsistent. Of particular concern is that teachers with the most extensive (and expensive!) programs were dissatisfied with those programs. Mentors and administrators were aware that the district-sponsored programs

did not meet the needs of beginning teachers but due to funding, scheduling and logistical issues no immediate solutions were offered from these participants. Music teachers wished to be provided with opportunities to interact with other music teachers. They wanted professional development experiences that focused specifically on strategies for music classrooms. They did not want to be required to attend professional development workshops that did not address the context of a music classroom. My perceptions as the researcher were that they needed opportunities to grapple with the differences between what they had learned in preservice programs and what they were experiencing in music classrooms out in the field.

Beginning teacher induction is not merely about retaining teachers in the field. It is about fostering growth in beginning teachers so that they emerge from the induction phase as reflective master music teachers. Although we can not assume that the perceptions of teachers in mid-Michigan can represent the voice of all beginning music teachers I would propose that most beginning music teachers would benefit from content-specific professional development experiences. Music educators must communicate with policy-makers and district-administrators so that these persons are made aware of the issues that face beginning music teachers.

Future researchers may consider the following questions: What are the specific areas of content-support identified by beginning music teachers?; Can arts teachers be provided with induction support that is meaningful for all arts areas, or do music, visual art, theater, and dance need completely separate programs?; How do we evaluate induction programs that are being provided by state organizations?; How do we measure the impact of induction and mentoring on beginning teacher retention and job satisfaction?; How do

we make connections between beginning music teacher induction and mentoring and student achievement in music?; and What is the role of cultural variables which interact with a beginning music teacher's support system (former teachers, other teachers in the school, spouse, friends, etc.)?

Although the music education profession has begun to focus on beginning music teachers in the policy arena (Asmus, 1999; Hill, 2003; and MENC 2000), we still have a relatively small research base by which to make decisions regarding beginning music teachers. The results of the mid-Michigan beginning music teacher inquiry are not surprising. Teachers, mentors and administrators responded with information that most music educators already knew. However, as beginning teacher induction continues to be on the educational policy forefront it is hoped that all researchers in beginning teacher induction will be sensitive to issues of content needs in music and other arts courses.

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